



*Legend of the
Five Rings*



4TH EDITION
ROLEPLAYING GAME

日本の地図







LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS RPG, 4TH EDITION

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FOREWARD

As I write this, the final files for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-playing Game, 4th Edition are being prepared and sent to our partners for layout. Writing and playtesting has been done for a little while now, and editing just wrapped up. We're going to run them through a secondary proofreading once the PDFs are done, but all the grunt work is finished. It's been almost two years since we started it, and now the finish line is in sight. For the most part, my work is done. And in its wake I find myself oddly missing it. Normally when I finish a big project I'm hugely relieved. This time, it's something that's been a part of my life virtually every day for nearly two years, and I'm kind of at a loss what to do now. Oh, there are plenty of follow-up projects: web support, the GM screen, the first couple of sourcebooks... but nothing quite like that basic book.

Obviously, for me to miss working on the book already, you can infer that this has been an amazing experience. I have been blessed in the past to work with amazingly talented professionals, people who were not only my coworkers but my friends as well, but this has been altogether different. The team I put together for this book has been nothing short of phenomenal, and I count myself lucky to have been able to work with such incredibly gifted designers. Todd likes to call this my magnum opus, and I'd love to confirm that, but in all honesty I cannot. Too many other good men and women have poured their heart and soul into this game for it to ever belong to just one person. I'm just happy to have been a part of it, and there are so many people without whom it never could have happened.

I'm always grateful to my family, who have supported me and encouraged me over the years. Julie and my parents, foremost, but my brothers, both biological and other, as well. And of course my little man, Dalton, with whom I hope I can one day play this amazing game. I love all you guys.

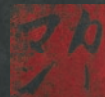
I'm grateful to my friends and coworkers on the Design Team, Rob and Brian. They have been there every step of the way and taken and improved upon ideas I've had in ways I never thought possible. It has been truly a pleasure. Not just the designers, though, but Jim and Todd as well, and the many others at the office who have given this project their unwavering support.

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SHAWN CARMAN

L5R Lead Writer
Alderac Entertainment Group





よろこび

*The scout races in and drops to one knee, fist to ground.
"Kazumi-sama," he pants, "the ploy has worked!"*

-THE TAISA

WELCOME TO



Scout coming in," Matsu Kazumi calls. The Taisa makes a gesture to the soldiers behind her.

The squadron of the Imperial Legions stirs itself to life, men and women rising to their feet and checking their horses. Shiba Naro re-ties the straps on his armor, noting out of the corners of his eyes that Bayushi Chieko is watching to make sure he does it right. He has been with the Fourth Legion for eight months now, but many of them still treat him like a hapless younger brother, even the ones like Chieko who are barely older than him. It doesn't help that Chieko is also highly attractive. Naro clamps his jaw and finishes his check before sliding the twin swords of his daisho underneath his silk obi belt. "At least now I am offered a chance to fight and show my worth," he thinks.

The scout races in and drops to one knee, fist to ground. "Kazumi-sama," he pants, "the ploy has worked!"

The Taisa smiles coldly and lets her gaze linger briefly to the southern horizon. The clouds of dust raised by the decoy force are just visible, smudges of gray-brown against the deep blue sky of summer. A handful of men on horseback, dragging branches to raise the dust of the full squadron, chasing after the handful of bandits who fled southwest to lure them away.

"And the bandits' main force?"

"One mile," the scout replies, pointing north. "They have made camp and stacked weapons."

"So ka," Kazumi says, and her smile turns feral. She swings into the saddle and turns her horse to face her soldiers. "Mount up! We finish these bandits today. This task has already taken far too long, now it ends!"

Shiba Naro mounts his sturdy Rokugani pony, soothing the animal's nerves with an absent motion of one hand, then snatches up a yari from the tripod of spears in the center of the camp. Chieko slips into position alongside him, pulling down her war-mempo to conceal her lovely features. She gives him a smile and Naro feels his face heat despite his efforts to maintain on. Hurriedly he ties on his own war-mask.

Within a few moments, the whole unit surges forward in a walk-trot, following the scout. The Legionnaires speed their pace as they pass through a low valley and up toward a ridge. They crest the top of the slope and suddenly the bandit camp is before them, dirty men scrambling up and reaching for weapons, an antheap kicked by a vengeful child. A roaring war-cry rises from the ranks of the samurai as they spur their mounts to a gallop. Eager for glory, Naro forces his mount ahead, into the front ranks of the charge, leveling his spear at the bandits. One of them is waving a yari in sharp, decisive gestures, trying to get his men into a defensive line, but they are not trained soldiers and the Legionnaires have caught them by surprise...

"And... that's an Initiative roll," the GM declares with a smile.



Welcome to the Emerald Empire

You hold in your hands the fourth edition of the Legend of the Five Rings role-playing game. Here in these pages is an exciting opportunity to delve into adventure and intrigue in a distant and exotic land, without ever leaving the comfort of your own home! Gamers have been visiting Rokugan, the Emerald Empire, since the first edition of this game was published in 1997, and we hope and expect this latest version will be even more exciting and compelling than its award-winning predecessors.

WHAT IS A ROLE-PLAYING GAME?

A role-playing game is a cooperative experience between multiple participants. At its simplest, it can be described as an organized form of group make-believe, with a set of rules and procedures to keep things consistent and fair. The goal is not to win – there are no real “winners” in a role-playing game – but simply to have a good time.

When a group of people get together to play a role-playing game, one of them is selected to be the Game Master (“GM” for short). Everyone else is a Player. Each player is responsible for creating a single fictional character, like a character in a novel or a movie. These are known as Player Characters (“PCs” for short) and they are, in effect, the “stars” of the story depicted in the game. The players completely control their characters, deciding what they do, what they say, how they feel, and how they react to the world around them. The rules contained in this book outline how these characters are created and what they are capable of doing, providing realistic limits on their capabilities and actions. These rules systems are commonly referred to as “mechanics.” Among other things, they explain how the players and the GM can use dice (in this case 10-sided dice) to resolve actions and events in the game.

Once the players have created their characters, the GM is responsible for presenting them with an adventure, by describing the events, locations, and individuals the characters encounter. For example, the GM may tell the players their characters have been gathered together as part of a tournament to earn honor and glory for their lords and clans. Or he may tell the players that their characters meet when the lord of the castle where they are staying is found dead, and they have to decide who killed him. Or he may tell them they



are all bitter enemies, and let the story grow from there. The GM is also responsible for administering the game itself, for controlling the flow of play, interpreting and controlling the rules, and deciding how the story plays out. The responsibility of the GM is considerable, as the description and actions of every object, creature, and individual the characters encounter is in his hands. The GM must try to anticipate the actions of the characters and how the world around them will react and be changed by those actions. The GM also serves as the final arbiter of the rules, of how they are applied to the game and what happens in situations where the rules are not clear. In effect, the GM is the engine of the imaginary world, the one who lends it motion and power, the one who spins the wheels of plot and unleashes dramatic challenges, twists, reversals, and climaxes.

Although a role-playing game is a game, it is not a competitive one. As mentioned above, no one really “wins” a role-playing game, and the GM and players are not on different “sides.” A role-playing game is intended to be a cooperative experience, an exercise in make-believe and interactive storytelling. Everyone works together to create a story that is emotionally engaging, dramatically satisfying, and enjoyable for all – even if it does not end well for the characters. After all, not all stories end happily, and some of the best stories are tragedies – especially in Rokugan.

Traditionally, a role-playing game is comprised of individual adventures, or stories, which happen one after the other. An extended series of such adventures is known as a “campaign,” and a successful RPG campaign can run for months or even years of play.

BUT WHY IS IT CALLED “ROLE-PLAYING”?

A key aspect of a role-playing game (or “RPG”), as its name implies, is that the players are supposed to get into the role of the characters they control, to imagine how those characters would speak and act in a given situation and play accordingly. Many players make a point of speaking as their characters, trying as much as possible to inhabit the role of their character rather than treating the character as a separate entity. This is known as “playing in-character” and is often both the most challenging and the most rewarding aspect of a role-playing game.

Likewise, the GM is responsible for taking on the roles of all the samurai, peasants, monsters, and other individuals which the players may encounter during the game. These innumerable characters are commonly referred to as Non-Player Characters (or “NPCs”) and giving them distinctive identities, personalities, and motives can be very challenging for the GM. The reward for this effort, however, is an imaginary world that seems to come to life around the players, making their adventures that much more engrossing and compelling.

WHY USE DICE?

Since the first role-playing games appeared in the 1970s, almost all of them have used dice in one way or another to resolve in-game actions. This is partly because role-playing games are descended from tabletop miniatures games, but it is also because using dice in the game provides a means

of depicting chance, luck, and fortune. Without dice, a role-playing game is not really a game at all, but merely an exercise in group storytelling, which can lead to disagreement and tension when different players want to push the story in different directions. The dice supply an impartial arbiter, out of the control of both players and GM, to prevent such disagreement.

Of course, dice aren’t the only way to resolve actions while inserting chance into a game – a few RPGs have employed other methods of resolving actions, such as drawing from a deck of cards, and some have even experimented with taking away dice altogether and letting the GM simply decide whether the players succeed or not. However, dice remain the most widespread and traditional method, and the one which Legend of the Five Rings uses by default. Of course, if you and your fellow players want to experiment with playing without dice, by all means do so!

What is Rokugan?

Rokugan is a fictional kingdom, a vast Empire whose history, myths, and culture draw heavily upon the real-life history and culture of ancient and medieval Asia, primarily Japan but also including China and Korea, among others. It is a land where samurai, honorable servants of the Divine Emperor, wage war and forge peace in the name of their lords. It is a land where mighty Great Clans, each comprised of multiple ancient families, work together and against one another in hopes of accomplishing their political and military agendas. It is a land where valiant warriors, or *bushi*, struggle to win the day for their clans on the field of battle. It is a land where pious *shugenja* priests offer prayers to the multitude of Fortunes in hopes of achieving the blessings of Heaven for their lands. It is a land where courtier politicians wage an endless war of words, seeking any possible advantage for their clans. Rokugan is an Empire of honor and glory, of strife and adventure, of horror and mystery.

WHY PLAY LEGEND OF THE FIVE RINGS?

There are many RPGs on the market, offering games on every topic from classic fantasy to science-fiction to costumed superheroes. We would assume, though, that if you’ve bought this book you are looking for a different sort of gaming experience than what you’ve been offered by those other games. What sets Legend of the Five Rings apart from them?

Legend of the Five Rings (often shortened to “L5R”) is a fantasy game, with magic and monsters, but it is not about killing monsters, collecting treasure, and rescuing princesses. It is a game about honor, heroism, and the moral consequences associated with the samurai code of Bushido. Rokugan is a world with a rigid code of conduct, morality, and authority. Samurai do not adventure for gold. They do not roam the land in search of vorpal blades conveniently nestled in the caves of wandering ogres. They honor their families, lords, and ancestors by respecting the traditions set forth by over 1,000 years of history and valor. What use are gems and flying carpets to the samurai, who carries the soul of his grandfather and the burden of tradition everywhere he walks?





It should be noted that L5R is not about playing a real-world samurai, but rather about the romanticized vision of samurai found in stories and film, a vision in which Honor and Bushido have real meaning and force. Players and GMs are creating the mythical and legendary tales of samurai who excel in their station. Such stories are not based on rational self-interest or self-preservation, but rather on heroic conduct in the tradition of Bushido. So if you don't know all the details of how samurai addressed each other, if you don't remember the myriad subtle differences between the Heian, Kamakura, Muromachi, Nara, Edo, Toyotomi, and Tokugawa eras of historical Japan – don't sweat it too much! Rokugan is ultimately a fantasy world, a fusion of Asian culture from many eras and many peoples. Samurai legends do not need to concern themselves with every mispronounced word or poorly placed Japanese honorific.

Bushido is the centerpiece of L5R, the fulcrum of every scene, act, adventure, and campaign. It is, ultimately, what sets this game apart from every other RPG. Bushido is the moral code, the “way of the warrior,” that informs the behavior of every samurai, whether bushi, shugenja, or scholar. It is a double-sided blade of conviction and narrow-mindedness. It is a culture of obedience and tradition. It is the path of the honorable and courageous. And it is the tool of every GM to make the players face the complex and often difficult consequences of their decisions and choices. Following Bushido is not easy, and characters' choices can twist in their hands like a bloodied knife.

With Bushido, a GM can make even the simplest adventure a daunting task, with every complication enriching the game experience. For example, consider an adventure where the dead body of a friend is finally found, but his *daisho*, the twin swords which mark him as a samurai, is missing. How can the body be brought back to the family honorably without the swords? Now the game is not a simple transportation mission with bandits trying to attack the caravan on the way home. Instead, the game is about the conflict between a proper funeral and a timely one. It is about honor and propriety, the things that truly matter to a samurai, not about attack rolls and Wound totals.

Of course, in truth no one can tell you how to play L5R. This book belongs to you and you can play the game in whatever way you want. But if you are willing to embrace the moral conflicts and compelling emotional drama inherent in Bushido and the samurai life, you will find Legend of the Five Rings to be in a class apart from any other RPG.

WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK

This book contains all the basic material you will need to design and play adventures in the world of Legend of the Five Rings. The Rokugani believe that all of reality is organized into five Elements – Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Void – and it is from these that the “five rings” of the title are derived. Accordingly, this book is divided into five chapters, each discussing a different aspect of Legend of the Five Rings.

The *Book of Air* contains basic information on the world of Rokugan. It includes a brief century-by-century history of the Emerald Empire, a discussion of Rokugani culture, beliefs, and customs, and specific discussion of the eight Great Clans who dominate the Empire's history and conflicts.

The *Book of Earth* contains the basic rules of the game. It explains the fundamental mechanics of playing Legend of the Five Rings, including the role and importance of the five Elemental Rings, the various die-rolling mechanics, and the essential rules of combat, dueling, and other actions.

The *Book of Fire* contains the basic character creation rules and offers detailed discussions of how to make an assortment of basic character types from each of the eight Great Clans. It also offers a full list of Skills, Advantages, Disadvantages, and Spells for use in the game.

The *Book of Water* contains advanced and optional rules, rules which the GM and players can decide to use or ignore as they please. These rules add more variety and customization options to the game. They include information on playing a character from one of the Minor Clans or Imperial Families, and a variety of special mechanics such as Alternate Paths, Advanced Schools, Kata, Kiho, Ancestors, and the sinister secrets of black magic (also known as *maho*) and the Shadowlands Taint.

Finally, the *Book of Void* contains rules and information for the GM. There is an extended discussion of different ways to construct adventures and campaigns for L5R, as well as rules for monsters and natural creatures, a basic selection of such creatures with which to challenge the players, and a sample adventure with which to start out your Legend of the Five Rings gaming experience.

A NOTE FOR RETURNING PLAYERS

Some players of Legend of the Five Rings Fourth Edition may be familiar with previous editions of L5R. Such players may feel daunted at the prospect of learning the game all over again. Fear not! Most of the basic mechanics have remained unchanged. Characters are still defined by the five Rings, their subsidiary Traits, and a selection of Skills. Mechanics such as Advantages, Disadvantages, Schools, Paths, Advanced Schools, and Spells have all been retained, but all of them have been redesigned from the ground up to ensure a balanced, thematically consistent game experience. Players should read through these mechanics carefully before assuming they still do the same things they did before.

There are a number of specific mechanical changes from earlier editions. For the convenience of returning players, we have summarized the most notable of these changes here:

- The Skill list has been reworked, rationalizing some errors in previous editions and, in the process, bringing back a few old favorites. Skills still have Emphases that allow PCs to specialize in using the Skill in a specific way, but instead of creating a bonus to the total roll, an Emphasis now allows players to re-roll dice that result in a 1. Skill Mastery Abilities, first introduced in 3rd Edition, are still around but have been simplified and re-designed.
- Weapons no longer have special abilities. A character's extra capabilities with a weapon are now determined solely by Skill Mastery and School Techniques.
- There are now five combat Postures, instead of three. The new Postures are Defense (which makes characters somewhat harder to hit, while still allowing them to cast spells or perform Skill rolls, but not attack) and Center (which is used for dueling and also allows a character to "power up" for a round before attacking).
- Iaijutsu duels have been streamlined and simplified, doing away with the need to spend endless time rolling Focus attempts.
- Initiative is now rolled once, at the start of combat, and changed only if a character has an Advantage or Technique which allows it to be modified later.
- The Action system has been simplified from 3rd Edition. A character may take one Complex Action or two Simple Actions per round. Characters may also take any number of Free Actions, but each specific type of Free Action (such as moving) can only be taken once per round.
- There are no longer Techniques which grant an extra attack. Instead, certain Techniques change attacks from a Complex Action to a Simple Action.
- Raises are now limited solely by Void, and the availability of Free Raises has been greatly reduced. Some of the combat maneuvers which can be performed with Raises have been changed significantly from 3rd Edition, especially the Extra Damage, Feint, and Disarm maneuvers.
- An assortment of standardized Conditions (such as Blind, Prone, and Stunned) have been introduced in order to simplify combat situations and consolidate information. Instead of searching through the rulebook to figure out what happens when your character is knocked down, you can simply flip to the Conditions section in the Book of Earth.
- The rules on Alternate Paths and Advanced Schools have been modified somewhat. In particular, Paths now replace a specific School Technique, instead of being "added in" between School Ranks, so there is now a real trade-off in taking a Path.
- The advanced rules for Kata, Kiho, and Ancestors have all been changed greatly from their previous forms.





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"We tell the stories of heroes to remind ourselves that we can also be great"

- DOJI SHIZUE